A Comparative Study of the Women Characters in the Select Novels of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De

A

Research Proposal Submitted to

SWAMI RAMANAND TEERTH MARATHWADA UNIVERSITY, NANDED

FOR THE REGISTRATION OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.) IN ENGLISH

UNDER

THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

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July-2021

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Introduction:

The present study entitled as **"A Comparative Study of the Women Characters in the Select Novels of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De"** puts a strong emphasis on comparison of women characters depicted in the novels of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De. Both the writers, Raja Rao and Shobhaa De, as a novelist, have great contribution to Indian writing in English, which has a large impact on literature in general and on novels in particular. The aim and scope of the present research is to compare the women characters on social, cultural, religious, ideological and feminist ground.

Literature is the reflection of society. What we see in our society reflects directly or indirectly in literature. It is centred at human heart and mind. A writer represents social, religious, cultural, ideological and political and also gender issues in his/her work of art which are related to human beings of his contemporary time. He presents the human emotions and feelings which have the universal appeal. He presents before us the society, its behaviour, its problems, its manners, its culture, its religion, its traditions, its rituals, and also individual personalities with different ideologies. Nothing is perpetual in the world, and so the human problems, their aspirations and behaviour. Different people have different attitude to look at life, society and its aspects in which they live. This attitude compels to compare one thing to another and judge what makes differences and similarities between them. Infact, objects of the comparison aren't always same. Often they are in the form of things and sometimes the comparison took place between more than two persons. In this study, I have chosen to compare the women characters of two different authors of different time: Raja Rao and Shobhaa De. Both born in Brahamin family have their own opinions, attitudes and ideologies to look at human life. The image of women in literature is changing due to the undergoing social, cultural changes, rise of information technology and due to different point of views to look at her. The

changing image of woman, her life, her status in her family and in society will be taken into account in this study.

Raja Rao : A Profile

Raja Rao was among the most-significant Indian English novelists during the middle of the 20th century. His contribution to Indian English literature as well as the world literature is remarkable. He has won international fame as a philosophical writer. His works are highly philosophical and are deeply rooted in metaphysics. He has tremendous impact of philosophy of Upnishidas and Vedas on him which is clearly reflected in his writing. Raja Rao was born on November 08, 1908, in Hasan, state of Maysore in an orthodox Brahmin family and died on July 08, 2006, Austin, Texas, USA. He received his early education at a Muslim school in Heyderabad and later on went Alighar Muslim University. He graduated from Madras University with English and History. Later on in 1929 he joined the University of Montpelliar in France and studied French Language and literature. He came back to India in 1939. He immigrated to the USA in 1960 and taught philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin.

Raja Rao, one of the great novelists of modern India has honoured with Sahitya Akademy Award (1964), Padma Bhushan (1969), Neustadt International Prize for Literature (1988) and Padma Vibhushan (2007). Though studied abroad, he has great nationalist heart. After returning from France, he took active part in India's struggle for Independence against British Rulers and also participated in 'Quit India' movement in 1942. Nationalism and Gandhi's principle of Ahimsa are the major themes of his writing. He wrote short stories, essays and novels. His major novels are ***Kanthapura*** (1938), ***The Serpent and the Rope*** (1960), ***The Cat ad Shakespeare: A Tale of India*** (1965), ***Cmorade Kirillov*** (1976) and ***The Chessmaster and his Moves*** (1988). ***The Cow of Barricades*** (1947), ***The Policeman and the Rose (***1978*),* ***On the Ganga Ghat (***1989) are the collections of short story. His Non-Fiction consists of ***Changing India: An Anthology*** (1939), ***Whiter India*** (1948), ***The Meaning of India, essays*** (1996) and The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahtma Gandhi, biography.(1998).

Kanthapura (1938) is the first novel of Raja Rao which has been described as the most satisfying of modern Indian novels. It is the story of how Gandhi's struggle for independence from the British came to a typical village, Kanthapura, in southern India. Though, Gandhi's struggle for independence is entirely political movement, the novel *Kanthapura* is not a political novel. Rather it is religious and social. The story is narrated by the old woman Achakka. Moorthy, a Brahmin youth, is the hero of the novel who is influenced by Gandhi and his principle and brings his movement in the village of Kanthapura. This dramatic tale of the novel is full of local myths (sthal- puranas). The active participation of women from all castes in the freedom struggle of India is remarkable. Due to the use of ancient myth and mythology the freedom struggle becomes more religious than political. The novel is full of feminine princinciple. The women of the village Kanthapura have played leading role in the struggle for independence. They have their organization 'Sevika Sangh'. The story is narrated by a woman and even the village protector is also a goddess, Kenchamma.

The Serpent and the Rope (1960) is semi autobiographical novel by Raja Rao. It deals with the concepts of existence, reality and fulfillment of one's capabilities. It is highly philosophical and symbolic. The Serpent stands for illusion and the Rope for reality. The vedantic philosophy, Adi Shankara's non – dualism, the spiritual truth, the Buddhism, East-West cultural encounter, and feminism are the major aspects of the study in this novel. The protagonist, a young intellectual Brahman, Ramaswamy, and his wife Madeleine, a French woman, try to seek the spiritual truth in England, France and India. The protagonist, an Indian young intellectual Brahman, Rama or Ramaswamy, lives in France. He gets married a young beautiful French girl. Their marriage resulted in divorce which indicates East and West never meet. Savitri, a young modern Indian girl comes in Rama's life. He falls in love with Savitri, but never expresses his love for her. Savitri too, has love for Rama, but she is engaged with Pratap. The love between Rama and Savitri is purely Spiritual love or Platonic love.

Raja Rao has presented traditional, modern as well as western women with their own religious, social, cultural, and philosophical ideologies. He has presented his views in metaphysical way. He was worshiper of tradition and culture of India.

The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India (1965), The Novel has been described by Raja Rao himself as a metaphysical comedy. The novel is a story of two friends Govindan Nair and Ramkrishna Pai. Pai is Nair's neighbor and the narrator of

the story. Nair is a clerk in the Rationing Office and Pai is a divisional clerk in the Revenue Board. Pai joined the office two years ago leaving his wife Saroj, a daughter and a son at Pattanur. Though he is married, loves Shantha, a school teacher, and dreams of building a big house. Pai's wife Saroja has nothing to say in this matter. Shatha also loves Pai. Usha, daughter of Pai, and Shantha embody the feminine principle. They are the instrument of divine grace. The novel deals with social issues like corruption, man's aspirations, greed, and lust for wealth. The story seems humorous but it has deep philosophic meaning. It is man's spiritual journey towards ultimate reality, his progress and achievements of his goal is presented through many symbols.

The Chessmaster and his Moves (1988) is a symbolic novel of Raja Rao. It is most ambitious novel rooted in Indian Tradition and sensibility. It is impossible or unfulfilled love story of Sivram Sastri, an Indian mathematician working in Paris and a married woman Jayalakshimi, a Rajput Princess. The unfulfilled love between Jaya and Sivram causes loneliness and frustration. It remains spiritual love. Later, Sivram comes across Suzanne Chantereux, a French actress and married woman, and falls in love with her. He is attracted by another French woman Mireille, the wife of a gynecologist. Both the French women like Indian culture and develop intellectual affinity with Sivram as they understand him well. Suzanne wants to marry Sivram and desires to have a child from him. She comes to know that Sivram is egoist and takes care of himself. Soon the differences develop between them and the love between them comes to an end. After this, Mireille comes in life of Sivram. Her love for Sivram is spontaneous, unconditional and pure. She is different from Suzanne but rejects her complete surrender to Sivram. All the three women Jaya , Suzanne and Mireille leave impact on Sivram and lead him to his spirituality and the ultimate truth.

Shobhaa De: A Profile

Shobhaa De is the most popular Indian novelist and columnist. She was born on January 07, 1947 in Brahmin family in Satara. She started her career as model, and latter on she tried her fate in journalism. She turned towards literary writing choosing the novel form as a medium to express her thoughts. She deals with the themes of power, greed, love and sex in her writing. Her writing is women centric. She tries to explore the condition of elite housewives trapped within the boundaries of custom and

society. Her women characters are in search of personal freedom and become rebellious and express their anger by braking marriage oaths and by indulging in extra marital relations. She is a bestselling author in India. Her popular novels are: ***Socialite Evening*** (1989), ***Starry Night*** (1992***), Sisters*** (1992), ***Strange Obsession*** (1992***), Sultry Days*** (1994), ***Snapshots*** (1995),and ***Second Thoughts*** (1996). Her short stories are collected in ***Small Betrayals*** (1995) and ***Selective Memory: Stories from my Life(1990) is her autobiography.*** She has non-fiction works also on her credit.

Socialite Evening (1989) is the first novel of Shobhaa De. It deals with bored rich housewives trapped in loveless marriages and their extramarital affairs. The protagonist and the narrator of the story is Karuna. Her marriage is a mistake since it is cool and meaningless. Her extra marital affair breaks the traditional moral values. Her rebellious image is a rise of a new woman who is in search of existence and selfhood. She rebels against patriarchal order and breaks down all the social, cultural, traditional and moral values to establish her identity.

Snapshots (1995) is a story of six school friends of Santa Maria High School Swati, Aparna, Reema, Rashmi, Noor and Surekha. They were gathered at Seema's house to recall the past memory and share their present. They all were invited by Swati. These all are revolutionary urban, economically independent and confident women. The story is women dominated and the men are marginalized. These all women have extra marital relations, only Noor is unmarried but she too has sexual relationship with her brother. Shobhaa De fearlessly reveals ugly and unnatural sexual practices by Metropolitan women. Her women are too modern, sophisticated, rebellious, westernized and characterless. But they are not the representative of Indian women. De suggests that Indian culture is undergoing in a certain social class.

Sisters (1992) is a novel which deals with corporate life. It is a story of .urban culture where human relationship has lost its all values. It is full of love, betrayal, sex, hatred, corruption, lust, greed, and conspiracy. Mallika (Mikki) the protagonist of the novel is daughters of renowned businessman Hiralal. She lived and studied in America has returned to India to attend the funeral of her parents who have died in an air-crash. Mikki was shocked by her parents' sudden death but she has to look after the vast industries of her parents. She comes to know extra marital relations of her father who has illegitimate daughter, Alisha. Alisha plays an important role in life of

Mikki. Both the sisters are of different nature, different views and thinking. Their relations are not good. Alisha hates Mikki but there is emotional union of both the sisters at the end of the novel. Failure of marriage is also the theme of this novel. Mikki's marriage with Binny resulted in divorce. The story explores the issues of women's freedom and identity in male dominated society.

In ***Strange Obsession*** (1992***)*** Shobhaa De deals with metropolitan life and culture. The story deals with sexual obsession too. Amrita is the central character and protagonist of the novel. She is grown up in her family with all the facilities and liberty to do what she liked. She has selected modelling as her profession. By her hard work, beauty and talent she succeeds in her profession and gains immense popularity. But she is trapped in lesbian relations with Minx. It becomes impossible for her to get rid of these relations. Her determination and her courage helped her to get out of her problems many times. The challenges before her make her brave and powerful to face any battle in life. The author shows that women are not humiliated and oppressed by men only, but by women also. She doesn't raise her voice against women's oppression but presents harsh reality of the society.

Second Thoughts (1996) is a story of a young, charming and romantic girl, Maya, a middle class girl from Calcutta. She is a trained textile designer and desires to escape from dull and boring life in her middle class home in Calcutta and leave for Bombay. The story moves around Maya, Ranjan and Nikhil, the three central characters of the novel. The story presents the reality of hollowness of marriage and hypocrisy of Indian society. Maya marries Ranjan, a educated, handsome, talented and ambitious boy who lives in Bombay. Her dream to be a part of Bombay comes in truth by marring Ranjan. Though, Ranjan and his family is wealthy, it is conservative. Maya becomes the victim of patriarchy where she is deprived of her freedom. She feels lonely due to all her desires, feelings and emotions are neglected by her husband. Ranjan is dull, emotionless, conservative, unromantic and impotent too fails to understand the sexual desire of Maya. Instead he asks Maya to perform womanly duties of a wife set by tradition and culture. On the contrary Nikhil, his colleague in bank, is modern and romantic. Maya attracts toward Nikhil and the extra marital love develops between them. Maya feels free and happy in the company of Nikhil. He understands the feelings of Maya, praises her, and composes a song in her praise to

please her. The novelist has unmuted the muted voice of woman trapped in arranged marriage the in Indian society.

Significance of the Study:

The present study 'A comparative study of the women characters' is quite significant. This study is significant as it tries to analyze how woman is presented in Indian English novel by male point of view as well as woman point of view. The study tries to analyze the transformation of woman from traditional to modern and modern to post modern. Women were ruled over, humiliated, oppressed in the past and are being humiliated, oppressed and neglected in the present also. The woman is integral part of the society. The society as well as the man is incomplete without her. She deserves respect, honour and equality. She should be worshiped, not to be a Goddess, but as a real human being and as a mother. Yet her voice is muted by patriarchy. The study emphasis on how women try hard for self realization and out of their aspirations and passions to make their career successful. Raja Rao has presented traditional woman and Shobhaa De has made an attempt to put forth the real image of woman of present scenario. The present study will help to understand the pains, passions, aspirations and struggle of woman to make their dream true.

Aims and Objectives of the research:

The objectives of the research can be summarized as follows:

1. To compare the women characters of the select novels on different level.
2. To focus the changing image of woman in Indian English Literature.
3. To know the thematic concern of the select novels for the study.
4. To highlight the similarities and dissimilarities of the women in the select novels of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De.
5. To study the interpersonal relationship among the characters in the select novels.
6. To interpret the aspiration, passions, and dreams of women.
7. To understand the message of the novelists in the select novel.

Statement of the Hypothesis:

The present study aims at comparison of the women characters in the select novels of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De. Both the authors have own International fame. One is renowned as philosophical, spiritual and metaphysical novelist. And the other is the author of bestselling novels. She has focused on several issues related to the woman in the contemporary scenario. The situations and characters in De's novels reflect the real condition of India in the contemporary period. Raj Rao has presented rich tradition and culture and Vedantic philosophy. He has glorified woman and presented her in mythical perspective and feminist perspective. Both the authors and their novels have worth to the appreciation of the readers in the contemporary period. In De's novels we notice the rise of new woman.

Scope and Limitations:

The broad area of the present study emphasis on the comparison of the women characters in the select novels Raja of Rao and Shobhaa De. The grounds of comparison are social, cultural, religious, ideological and feminist. The study from this angle will give a complete insight to understand the similarities and dissimilarities of the women presented by both the novelists. It will help to understand the transformation of woman from traditional to modern and post modern. Both the authors have lot of creative works on their credit. Besides, there are number of writers in Indian English writing. It is impossible to cover all the writers and their works in this study. With these limitations, the present study is confined to Raja Rao's four novels and Shobhaa De's five novels as listed below.

Raja Rao's novels:

1. *Kanthapura*.
2. *The Serpent and the Rope*
3. *The Cat and Shakespeare*
4. *The Chessmaster and his Moves*

Shobhaa De's novels:

1. *Socialite Evening*
2. *Snapshots*

3. *Strange Obsession*
4. *Sisters*
5. *Second Thoughts*

Research Methodology:

It is library work. The collected data would be in the form of the primary and secondary sources. The Primary sources include four novels by Raja Rao and five novels by Shobhaa De. The secondary sources consist of the reviews, articles, interviews of the writer published in various journals, magazines and books. The authentic information through internet would be used in this research. The basic methods of literary research such as close reading, explication, illustration and analysis would be under taken. However the major focus will be on the comparison of the women characters in the select novels. The methodology of research adopted for this work will be interpretative and analytical in nature. This thesis will also attempt to study other social and cultural problems in the novels of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De.

Plan of the Thesis:

The thesis will comprise five chapters as follows.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: The Women Characters in the Novels of Raja Rao

Chapter 3: The Women Characters in the Novels of Shobhaa De

Chapter 4: Comparison of Women Characters of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Outline of the Research:

Chapter 1: Chapter 1 of this Research is **Introduction.** In this chapter the researcher will carry out the brief survey of Indian English Novels in general and contribution made by Raja Rao and Shobbha De to the development of Indian English Novels in particular and also their place

in the world literature. He will also give a brief account of the changing image of woman presented in Indian English novels.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2 of this research is **The Women Characters in the Novels of Raja Rao.** In this chapter researcher will discuss the various themes in the novels of Raja Rao. The women characters will be analysed on social, cultural, religious, ideological and feminist ground. The importance of women in man's life will be interpreted.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 of this research is **The Women Characters in the Novels of Shobhaa De.** In this chapter of the Research, the researcher will focus on the systematic analysis of the women characters in the select novels of Shobhaa De. The characters will be analysed on cultural, moral, social, ideological and feminist ground. The themes of her novels will be discussed.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4 of this research is **Comparison of Women Characters of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De .** In this Chapter, the researcher will compare the women characters of Raja Rao and Shobhaa De on various grounds. He will points out the similarities and dissimilarities of the women characters of selected novels.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5 of this research is **Conclusion.** It is the last chapter of the thesis. In this chapter the researcher will make concluding remarks with his findings and the relevance of the study to the contemporary society. The women psyche against the egoist men in the contemporary society will be discussed.

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